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COVID-19 VACCINATION DRIVE AFTER SCIENTISTS' NOD: PM

Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Friday that experts believe the coronavirus vaccine will be ready in a few weeks

HEALTHCARE WORKERS TO BE GIVEN PRIORITY

In his remarks at a virtual all-party meeting, Modi said healthcare workers involved in treating Covid-19 patients, frontline workers including police personnel and municipal staff, and old people suffering from serious conditions will be inoculated on priority. On vaccine price, the PM said public health will be accorded top priority and states will be fully involved

PANDEMIC A SECURITY CHALLENGE: AZAD

- Covid-like pandemics can pose a threat to the country's internal security and policy makers should address this challenge, senior Congress leader Ghulam Nabi Azad said
- This is the second all-party meeting by the Centre to discuss the Covid-19 situation since the outbreak of the pandemic | P9

8 vaccines

AT VARIOUS STAGES OF TRIAL & THEIR PRODUCTION ASSURED IN INDIA: PM

CHENNAI • MADURAI • VIJAYAWADA • BENGALURU • KOCHI • HYDERABAD • VISAKHAPATNAM • COIMBATORE • KOZHIKODE • THIRUVANANTHAPURAM • BELAGAVI • BHUBANESWAR • SHIVAMOGGA • MANGALURU • TIRUPATI • TRICHY • TIRUNELVELI • SAMBALPUR • HUBBALLI • DHARWAPURI • KOTTAYAM • KANNUR • VILUPURAM • KOLLAM • WARANGAL • TADEPALLIGUDEM • NAGAPATTINAM • THRISSUR • KALABURAGI

Farmers during their protest against the new farm laws at Ghazipur on the Delhi-UP border on Friday | PRAVEEN NEGI

Farmers intensify stir, announce Bharat Bandh

HARPREET BAJWA @ Chandigarh

FARMERS' unions on Friday intensified their agitation by announcing a Bharat Bandh on Tuesday (December 8) if the Centre fails to agree to repeal three contentious farm sector reform laws that were rammed through by Parliament.

Rejecting the government's offer to suitably amend the laws to address their concerns during Thursday's talks, the Sanyukt Kisan Morcha's meeting at the Singhu border unanimously decided to explore other means as well to bring the Centre to its knees, including laying siege to toll plazas across the country to stop them from charging toll tax from commuters and choking all entry points to Delhi.

Though a timeline for the new agitation programme is yet to be firmed up, the earlier decision on burning effigies of the Modi government and corporate leaders on Saturday will happen as scheduled.

Also, the award wapsi that began on Thursday with Badal Senior returning his Padma Vibhushan, will intensify on Monday, they decided. In all, 51 union leaders participated.

All 32 protesting farmer unions had a joint session before the marathon meeting of the Sanyukt Kisan Morcha.

Though farmers will participate in the next round of talks with the Centre on Saturday, a categorical assurance on repealing the three laws and constitutional guarantees on the minimum support price (MSP) regime alone will take the process forward, they said.

Bharatiya Kisan Union, Punjab (Lakhowal Group) general secretary Harvinder Singh Lakhowal said, "Now that farmers from across the country are with us, dharnas will be held in Karnataka, Maharashtra and elsewhere. It's no longer an agitation restricted to Punjab farmers. We have told the government to call a special session of Parliament to repeal the three farm laws."

Bharatiya Kisan Union general secretary Yudhvir said, "Farmers are upset across the country. We have told our state leaders to get the farmers ready for a long battle as the government wants to test our patience."

Political support for the protest snowballed on Friday with West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav announcing a series of agitations in solidarity. Mamata spoke to various groups of agitating farmers and announced street protests from next week in Bengal to amplify the call against the new farm laws.

Foreign office pulls up Canadian envoy

The foreign office on Friday summoned the Canadian High Commissioner and lodged a protest against comments by Canadian leaders and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on the farmers protests, saying it could have a damaging impact on bilateral ties | P9

Karnataka braces for bandh today

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

DESPITE Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa's appeal to pro-Kannada organisations not to go ahead with the Karnataka bandh from 6 am to 6 pm on Saturday, the organisers are determined.

Yediyurappa said on Friday: "This bandh is not required, and I appeal to them not to trouble people with the bandh." He also stressed that he was making all efforts to take all communities along. The CM said his government is giving prominence to Kannada language and is even willing to consider suggestions from the pro-Kannada organisations.

WHAT IS RUNNING

Medical stores, hospital and other medical services, BMTC, KSRTC buses, Metro service, milk supply, essential services, ATMs, fuel pumps, food joints, hotels and vegetable/fruit shops, meat stalls, government offices of all departments and garment factories and industries

WHAT MAY BE OFF

Cab and auto services, theatres and shopping malls

However, Kannada activist Vatal Nagaraj, who is leading the agitation against the formation of the Maratha Development Corporation, confirmed to The New Indian Express that they will go ahead with the state-wide bandh on Saturday. "It will be 100 per cent successful. The government is trying to do everything to ensure that the bandh is not successful, but people of the state are supporting us," he claimed.

Several pro-Kannada outfits, including Vatal Nagaraj's Kannada Chalavali Vatal Paksha, Karnataka Rakshana Vedike and Kannada Samara Sene had called for the statewide bandh after the CM announced the formation of the MDC with a grant of Rs 50 crore for the "overall development of the Maratha people in Karnataka".

Home Minister Basavaraj Bommai said the government will take stringent action against those forcing the bandh.

CONTINUED ON: P4

MONETARY POLICY

RBI HOLDS KEY RATES, PROJECTS REVIVAL BY Q3

Factoring in the nascent signs of economic revival, RBI Governor **Shaktikanta Das** said RBI now expects GDP to contract only 7.5% in FY21, as against its previous projection of 9.5% slippage.

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ New Delhi

WITH inflation remaining stubbornly high, Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Friday chose the predictable option of leaving interest rates unchanged for the third time in a row, but maintained its accommodative stance and improved growth forecast.

The banking regulator's six-member Monetary Policy Committee decided to keep the benchmark repo rate — at which RBI lends to commercial banks — at 4%. The reverse repo rate — at which banks lend to the central bank — was kept unchanged at 3.35%.

The MPC also decided to continue with the accommodative stance "as long as necessary" — not just in the current financial year but also in the next year.

Talking to reporters after the MPC meeting on Friday, RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das said inflation continues to be a sticky issue, hinting at similar monetary policy action in the next MPC meeting. P13

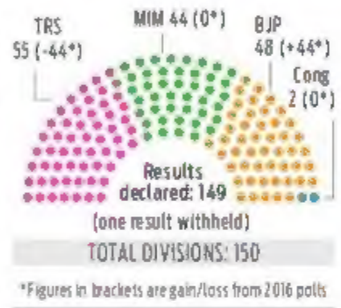
Saffron dims pink glow in GHMC polls

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Hyderabad

IN a major setback for the ruling TRS in the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) polls, the BJP has emerged as the second largest party, winning 12 times the seats it had won in 2016. The BJP's stellar performance came close on the heels of TRS suffering a drubbing in the Dubbaka rural assembly bypoll a few weeks ago.

The GHMC results signify two aspects — the political space hitherto occupied by the Congress or the TDP is going the BJP's way and the victories in Dubbaka and Hyderabad for BJP may see more leaders from other parties beginning to look at the saffron party with renewed interest. P7

PARTY POSITION



*Figures in brackets are gain/loss from 2016 polls

MAKEOVER

Liquor stores to have new, clean look

ASHWINI M SRIPAD @ Bengaluru

SOON, liquor outlets and bars across the state will sport a fresh look and will also be spick and span. Right from the signboards to wall painting and kitchens, the premises will have to be kept clean with focus on hygiene.

The State Government will issue guidelines to improve the look and feel of these establishments. Excise officials will conduct inspection and, if the premises is not clean, or even if the glassware is not washed properly, they will lose their licence, warned Excise Minister H Nagesh.

Speaking to *The New Indian Express*, Nagesh said most of the liquor stores and bars are not maintained properly and cleanliness is the least of their priorities.

"These establishments should look attractive. If not of international standard, at least cleanliness should be maintained. We will be directing them to change the nameboards/signboards, have clean furniture and clean premises including painting of walls," he said.

"Once the guidelines are issued, officials will conduct inspection at random and licences of those outlets not adhering to the policy may even by cancelled," the minister asserted.

CONTINUED ON: P7

FIVE MLAS MAY MAKE IT TO BSY CABINET

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Belagavi

THE much-talked about expansion of Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa's cabinet is expected to happen soon with the party senior leadership believed to have given its nod to induct five legislators.

BJP general secretary in charge of Karnataka, **Arun Singh**, is said to have handed over the list to Yediyurappa prior to the start of the core committee meeting held in Belagavi on Friday. Highly placed party sources said R Shankar, M T B Nagaraj, Muniratna, Umesh Katti and C P Yogeshwar will make it to the cabinet.

Ever since the formation of the Yediyurappa-led BJP government, Umesh Katti, eight-time MLA from Hukkeri, has been consistently lobbying for a cabinet berth. If Katti is inducted as expected, Belagavi district will have the highest number of five lawmakers in the cabinet.

Including Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa and state party in-charge, Arun Singh, 10 members of the BJP core committee participated in the meeting held on Friday. They included Union minister Pralhad Joshi, party state president Nalin Kumar Kateel, ministers Jagadish Shettar, Govind Karjol, R Ashoka and K S Eshwarappa, party national general secretary C T Ravi and Mahadevapura MLA Aravind Limbavali. Union Minister D V Sadananda Gouda and senior leader C M Udasi and two others skipped the meeting. P6

The IITs should tell us how any room can be converted into a cold storage facility with an inexpensive assembly unit

H D Deve Gowda, former PM

Will Union Govt pick up vaccine tab, asks Gowda

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

FORMER Prime Minister H D Deve Gowda on Friday raised four pertinent questions regarding the Covid-19 vaccination plan during the all-party meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

At a time when states, including Karnataka, are facing severe fund crunch, Gowda asked if the Centre will bear the cost of vaccination or if state governments will have to pitch in. In an 8-point written submission, the JDS national president also offered suggestions to the Centre on mitigation of Covid. Stressing that care must taken to ensure that case numbers do not spiral out of control, he said hopes of a vaccine cannot be the basis to throw caution to the wind. P7

EXPRESS READ

US okays sale of $90 mn worth of military hardware

Washington: The US has approved the sale of $90 million worth of military hardware and services in support of its fleet of C-130J Super Hercules military transport aircraft.

$1 MN AWARD

Global teacher with a golden heart

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ New Delhi

FOR a primary school teacher in rural Maharashtra, it was a million dollar moment as he was named winner of the 2020 Global Teacher Prize that had more than 12,000 contenders from over 140 nations. That Ranjitsinh Disale has a heart of gold became evident from the fact that he resolved to share a whopping 50% of the prize money with nine other fellow finalists.

Hailing from Paritewadi village in Solapur district, Disale, 32, won the $1 million prize for his efforts to promote girls' education and help trigger a quick-response coded textbook revolution in the country.

Ranjitsinh Disale

A video clip of the ceremony, capturing the moment Disale was named the winner and his beaming parents, trended on Twitter.

Disale's interventions since 2009 helped kids access books in local languages. He embeded textbooks with unique QR codes to give students access to audio poems, stories and assignments. Teachers, he said, are the real changemakers. "They always believe in giving and sharing, which is why, I will share 50% of the prize money among my fellow finalists." Disale said.

IS IT OUR FAULT?

The only allegation against Sahara India Pariwar is that our repayments to the esteemed investors are getting delayed. Of course we are also paying the interest of delayed period.

Nobody is writing the reason.

The reason is -

Owing to the embargo imposed for the last 8 years by the Hon'ble Supreme Court, any money generated through selling or mortgaging our assets of the entire group (including Co-operatives) or from joint ventures will be deposited in the Sahara-SEBI account, as per the directives of Hon'ble Supreme Court. Out of this, we cannot use even a single rupee for organizational work. Not even for repayment to the esteemed investors.

On the other hand, till date, approximately ₹22,500 crore including interest (which will surely come back to us as per Hon'ble Court's order) has been deposited in the Sahara-SEBI account. Whereas, despite giving four rounds of advertisements in 154 newspapers by SEBI in the last 8 years across the country, SEBI has repaid only ₹106.10 crore to the esteemed investors (means only 0.5% payment has been done) and there is no claimant anymore.

Now Sahara should not be required to deposit more money in the Sahara-SEBI account. The embargo on us should be lifted now and the order of verification should come. But all these decisions will be taken by the Hon'ble Supreme Court. On the other hand, due to COVID-19 for the last 10 months, we haven't been able to get a date from the Hon'ble Supreme Court.

We hope that we will soon get a date and everything will be good.

We are working on various sources of money. Everybody's money is totally safe. You are getting the interest of the delayed period.

Do have some patience. We shall all emerge victors by 31st March 2021.

SAHARA INDIA PARIWAR

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